

**Closing speech of the 6<sup>th</sup> ENSREG Conference**  
**Mr Gerrit Niehaus (Germany)**

Dear Colleagues, Friends, Participants of this Sixth ENSREG Conference,  
Ladies and Gentlemen.

Thank you very much! Thank you very much for one and a half day of outstanding debates, fruitful discussions, most interesting insights from different perspectives – and for the broad participation in this Sixth ENSREG Conference with more than 230 registered participants from all over Europe, from the world – and with many different backgrounds:

- International organisations,
- Regulators,
- Legislators,
- Operators,
- NGOs,
- TSOs,
- representatives from the industry, from the academics, from civil society.

All relevant stakeholders have come together for this event and have shared their points of view on the issues discussed. And even more than that, in addition to the formalised but fruitful exchange here in this Conference room, we have had plenty of time to pick up the discussions during the – very excellent – lunch and the coffee breaks. Thus, we intensified the personal contact and got to know each other better: this is the heart of ENSREG Conferences.

Following the opening session with high-ranking representatives, we addressed one of the saddest issues an ENSREG Conference had ever to deal with: a war in Europe. The Russian attack on Ukraine has changed the world and this change does not leave the nuclear world untouched. We welcomed the Ukrainian delegation which provided us with first-hand insights from nuclear regulation in a war zone that, in one way or another, also affects us here in Brussels and in our homelands. We discussed the limited means of the existing legal framework to address such situation and whether new rules were necessary. We learned how support is organised and provided from the international nuclear community. Indeed,

there are ways for us as nuclear regulators to assist our Ukrainian friends – yet, our means are limited. Thus, again: we call on Russia to put an end to this war. Also, we elaborated on the importance of communication – of open, direct and honest communication that can build trust both within the nuclear community and towards the public.

We then followed an extremely interesting first topical session. We listened to presentations on how the nuclear sector has dealt with a situation that we all had to deal with in our private lives to an unforeseeable extent. In 2020, a pandemic struck the world and while now – in the summer months of 2022 – we live our lives more or less like we did before, the winter and possibly more variants of Covid-19 are yet to come. The nuclear sector, as we learned, has shown good resilience. This is partly because of existing redundancies and partly because of the high amount of responsibility with which nuclear regulators and operators have acted. No pandemic-related outages, no shut-downs were reported, rather the energy production was hugely reliable. This constitutes a high value in times of uncertainty! However, it is possible, that some “Long-Covid”-effects are yet to come: this could concern investments, delayed maintenances and maybe even training of staff.

Yesterday’s second topical session addressed public participation. It addressed how this can be a very complicated, yet highly valuable instrument. We learned about legal and extra-legal consultation processes and that it is impossible to lead a public debate on a project without addressing the underlying policy. We heard some very relevant examples from Belgium, France and Sweden. We know that we need to be serious about the concerns of the public: because we want to reach out and build trust – and also, from a legal point of view: because the Directives oblige us to. But we need to do expectation management, on both sides of the table. And the “why” is of great importance. This means, we have to listen carefully and understand “why” a conflicting opinion exists, but also we need to carefully explain “why” a decision is taken at some point of the process.

In our first session this morning, new designs have been discussed from a regulatory point of view. A lot is in the making, a lot is on paper – and one important question we need to answer is: what role do we, as nuclear safety regulators, play? We do not want to be an

obstacle to technical innovations but are we a facilitator to industry needs? What we heard boils down to this: a possible common approach will always respect “nuclear safety first” and this we need to provide for. We learned, that – again – early and transparent communication between regulators and licensees is crucial. But, where is the early involvement of the public, as we discussed just a session before? And does it fit to the role of the regulator to discuss design issues with the industry? It would indeed constitute an obstacle to innovation if the regulator turned out to be biased in the following licencing process.

With the final session, we addressed what greatly affects our future and the future of coming generations: research and how it is decided, what research we need - and spend money on. We heard from the presentations that several challenges need to be tackled. This includes the development of a research strategy, how to allocate limited resources and how to communicate research results to the public. This extremely relevant discussion is required continuously so that we can keep track, also with those innovations addressed in the topical session before.

As final thought, before we are invited for a cocktail lunch, I want to emphasise and praise the lively debates we have had during this Conference. This reflects exactly what nuclear regulation in a European context is characterised by: there is no strong European Regulator, but rather a system of decentralised, national regulators. They all – we all – have and respect our national responsibility. But we have established an open-minded approach by the means of good communication and cooperation. Two words which we have heard in almost every session of this Conference. Open and honest Communication and cooperation helps to establish an ambitious level of nuclear safety. This gets tested on a regular basis, namely by our peer review exercises, through ENSREG and in events like we experienced in the past two days. In this atmosphere of trust we achieved, an open word is appreciated and with open and open-minded discussions, we are doing our part to continuously improve nuclear safety across Europe. This culture of openness, of honesty, is a high value I want us to preserve.

With this final thought, ladies and gentlemen, dear friends, we can conclude the sixth ENSREG Conference. Thank you very much for your contributions. Thank you, Ann MacLachlan, for your outstanding moderation.

Thank you to all those who made this event possible.

Get home well. Good bye.